WHY THE CONTINUING DEBATE?

Trains, buses, carpools, and auto tolls should play nicely together in regions of high congestion.

I've worked throughout the world for several decades helping governments and the private sector to reduce automobile congestion, create more livable communities, and, in so doing, to acknowledge that fossil fuels are a finite natural resource. It seems, intrinsically, so simple. The basic goals are:

- *Reducing traffic congestion*
- *Providing choices for people's travel to work, play, and the necessities of life*
- *Recognizing individual desires to live and travel where, when and how one chooses and as may fit best each individual or family unit's lifestyle*
- *Understanding the significant plight of the planet with respect to natural resource depletion and emission of greenhouse gases.*

Having worked in Hawaii since the 1980s, I've found that these same broad goals apply here.

Honolulu has some of nation's worst traffic congestion. It also hosts one of the nation's best and most touted mass transit corridors – the high capacity principal corridor from Kapolei through Downtown Honolulu to Ala Moana, and onward through Waikiki and to the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

What kind of mass transit is best for Honolulu? The reality is that we need a variety of complementary programs. The traffic congestion that exists in Honolulu – and grows worse every year – will not be solved by a single technology or solution.

Certainly, the huge travel demand in Honolulu's primary corridor, together with the concentrated centers of activity and relatively dense living and working venues on the Island, warrant an exclusively-tracked, permanent transit solution.

Most transportation and planning experts understand that private investment in new and improved community facilities occurs when the governing bodies of a region focus resources on a rail-based transit system. One need only look at places around the world like Singapore, Vancouver, Hong Kong, Toronto, and successful programs in the United States where anti-transit zealots never expected rail transit to succeed: Dallas, Salt Lake City, Portland, Denver, and others. Regardless of the actual number of passengers using these systems, peak-period usage continues to grow significantly every year. Honolulu's fixed guideway transit system is projected to attract far more riders than any of the U.S. cities cited above.

There are a variety of applications and technologies that should work together to encourage reduction in traffic congestion and increases in community betterments. So-called "managed lanes" can certainly be an asset in areas where transit usage is low and people are willing to pay substantial tolls to enjoy driving in highway lanes reserved for people willing to pay for the privilege.

Academics and economists often cite the managed lanes on State Route 91 – the Riverside Freeway – in Orange County, California as a proven example of the efficacy of such approaches. It's true: Drivers who are willing to have $10.00 charged automatically to their Visa or MasterCard *one way* can indeed purchase the privilege of free-flow traffic for a part of their daily rush-hour automobile trip. The average commuter who uses these managed lanes daily pays about $50.00 per week.

For people willing to pay the fee, and for developers willing to undertake public-private ventures to build such toll roads and "HOT (High Occupancy Toll) lanes," benefits accrue to users and to others who utilize the "free" lanes. Managed lanes are "managed" so that tolls increase whenever congestion threatens free-flow conditions. Of course, when these toll-payers arrive at their destinations, they still face the problems of local

roadway congestion, finding a parking place, and paying often exorbitant rates to store their cars. This would certainly be the case in Honolulu.

As the entrepreneur responsible for conceiving and developing the only private toll highway in the Western United States – the South Bay Expressway in San Diego, which opened to toll-payers last December – I understand the economics, risks and rewards of toll- and carpool-based solutions. I certainly support such programs as one of a variety of solutions to relieve traffic congestion and provide community benefits.

But the time has come to set the record straight: While managed lanes, HOT lanes, or bus lanes can be a useful complement to a fixed guideway system, such approaches are no substitute for a permanent rail-based system as the *backbone* of a regional transit program.

In Honolulu, in the peak hour, an estimated 10,000 people may ride a fixed guideway transit system. Some 200 buses, or one every 20 seconds, would be required to carry that passenger load, compared to about 18 light rail trains. In either case, a separate, elevated structure would be necessary to move that number of vehicles without eliminating existing traffic lanes and creating huge conflicts with traffic and pedestrians. Of course, with buses every 20 seconds, there would be no feasible way for toll-paying automobile drivers to intermingle in the platoon of buses, thus eliminating the concept of a "HOT" lane. Furthermore, an elevated structure necessary to support two hundred buses per hour would be a much larger and significantly more obtrusive structure than one necessary for a rail-based system. And, there are the added labor costs, since every vehicle needs a driver.

So let's stop pretending that Honolulu's mobility crisis can be solved by building an expensive, new *elevated highway* for buses, carpools, or for people willing to pay $50 per week or more in tolls. Honolulu may choose to continue with cars, buses, and highways as the ultimate solution – climate change and greenhouse gas emissions notwithstanding – but we all must understand the reality of that choice. Let's end the diversionary debate, and recognize that rail, buses, carpools, toll lanes, bicycles,

walking, and the resulting livable communities will together provide the future that this Island deserves.

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